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Book Reviews

THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS

Those who are apt to be impatient of the controversy about the existence of Jesus sometimes need to be reminded that it is not so arbitrary or capricious as it seems. It is a problem which has been started by the very methods of recent criticism upon the origins of Christology especially in relation to Paulinism. If "liberal" theology emphasizes a pre-Christian eschatology and Christology which Paul employed to make a redeemer out of the Jesus of Nazareth, it was not altogether unnatural for the radical criticism of Drews and Jensen to deduce the non-existence of any such Jesus, either by denying the authenticity of the Pauline letters or by so reading them as to discover no evidence for the existence of an earthly figure behind the speculative theology of the apostle. At the same moment came the movement which modified the supposed historical character of Mark's Gospel. The result was a restatement of the mythical hypothesis, which no longer regarded the gospels as a record of myth gathering round a real figure, but as speculative constructions based partly on older oriental mythology and partly on the Old Testament narratives.

The controversy has blown itself out, and, as is usual in such phases of discussion, it has thrown up one or two books of more than transient value, in which the fundamental issues are presented. Professor Case's volume belongs to this class.¹ He accepts the challenge from the standpoint of liberal theology, and seeks to show that the negative argument will not meet the historical and critical data of the New Testament. The teaching of Jesus, as he points out, requires a historical personality, and the christological speculations of the primitive church are based upon a resurrection-faith which could not have existed apart from a historical founder of the religion. He has some apposite remarks upon the latter point.

Even if we should accept without question—as probably the disciples did—the objective reality of their vision, we should still have to ask why

¹ *The Historicity of Jesus. A Criticism of the Contention That Jesus Never Lived, a Statement of the Evidence for His Existence, an Estimate of His Relation to Christianity.* By Shirley Jackson Case. The University of Chicago Press, 1912. Pp. viii + 352. \$1.50.

they connected the heavenly apparition with the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. This was not the only course open to them. They might have abandoned Jesus entirely, saying that he had disappointed their expectations, that his claims had been discredited by death, and that God had now shown to them in a vision the true heavenly Messiah for whom they were to wait. This however was not the course they pursued. . . . The fundamental surety of their faith was the conviction that Jesus—Jesus of Nazareth, with whom they had associated in the daily walks of life, he who had inspired that discipleship and whose influence had left its indelible mark upon them—had survived the obliterating stroke of death. Memory of him is inseparably linked with the primitive resurrection faith.

Professor Case makes out a good statement for the position of the liberal theologians against their opponents. So far as the existence of Jesus is concerned, he has not much difficulty in proving his point. It is a moot question, however, if the presuppositions of his argument do not lead to a somewhat richer Christology than he adumbrates in the closing chapter, on Jesus' significance for modern religion; if the two foci of the orbit of Christology are the perfect humanity and the absolute deity of Jesus Christ, the idealization of Jesus, which liberal theology presents, does not seem a particularly adequate expression for the latter. Hence, while Professor Case's book closes the door upon the controversy about the existence of Jesus, it opens a further set of problems about his religious significance which have hardly reached their final statement in the admission that "he is now, as he has always been, the great Savior" by inspiring men to realize in their own lives a genuine experience of God and to live worthily of their highest ideals.

The argument of the book against the Drews school, however, is lucidly and patiently stated. It is not a mere exposure of the errors committed by that school, but an attack upon their strongest points, and, as the subtitle indicates, a positive survey of the evidence which will command respect for its fairness and completeness. It is written for the use of non-experts, and it is sure to be of service in quarters where confident assertions about the unhistoricity of Jesus have made any impression on the popular mind. But scholars will also find the book of use. It is an appeal to the laity, and at the same time full of suggestion, especially in the latter half, for theologians, whether they agree with it or not.

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